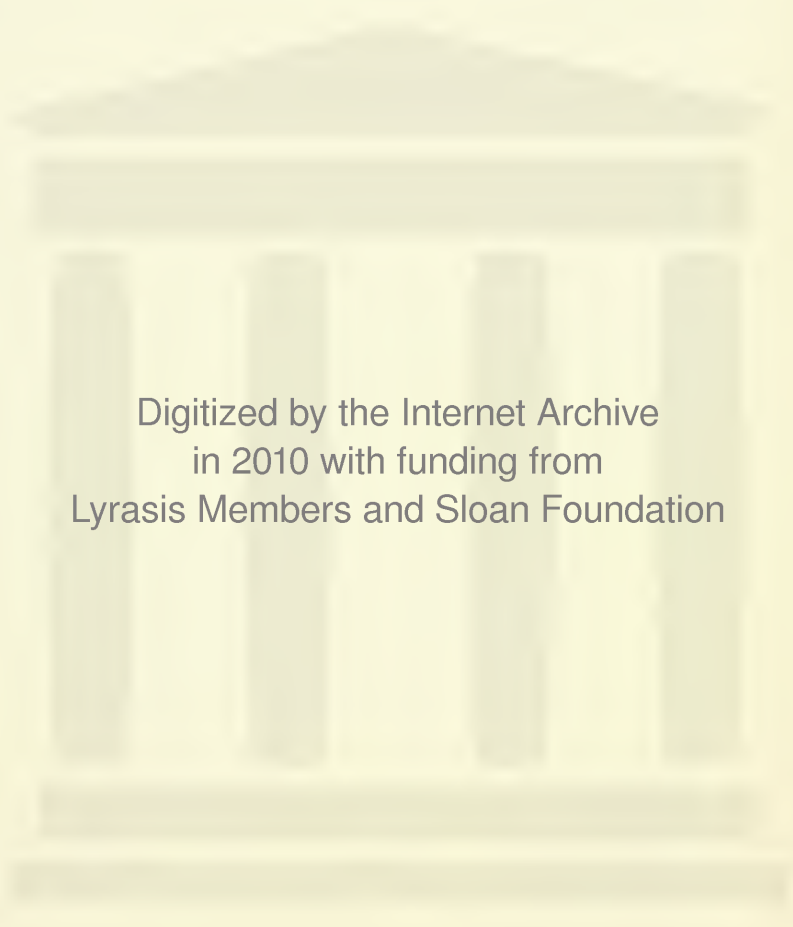


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The Archaeology of Prostitution:
Literary and Material Evidence

A Senior Honors Thesis in the Department of Classics, Sweet Briar College
by Rebecca Cefaratti

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Judith Evans Grubbs 4/30/02

Prof. Judith Evans-Grubbs

date

Eric Casey 4/30/02

Prof. Eric Casey

date

Susan T. Stevens 5/02/02

Prof. Susan Stevens

date

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CHAPTER ONE – INTRODUCTION

Aims and Methods

The daily lives of prostitutes in the early Roman Empire are difficult to recover from the ancient sources; the evidence is scattered throughout various genres of literature as well as throughout the documentary and archaeological records. Such a distribution of sources renders scholarship on the subject difficult because the scholar often must split her time between so much diverse evidence. As Judith Hallett so eloquently penned, “the paucity of ancient Greco-Roman evidence which pertains to women...[has] made it especially necessary for those of us interested in recovering women’s lived reality and even women’s cultural image in Greece and Rome to engage in interdisciplinary and ingenious research efforts.”¹ For this reason, this research limits the scope of its focus as much as possible (though, obviously, not completely) to the physical remains of prostitution that have survived in the archaeological and art historical records. Such data may remain in the form of the actual material culture from a site thought to have been a brothel, or in the spatial position of brothels (i.e. where the structures are located in the urban plans in relation to the rest of the city). The erotic art and graffiti that are interspersed throughout various structures also provide much information about sexual life and prostitution.

When this thesis was first undertaken, its aim was to look at the archaeology of prostitution per se and the information that it could provide on the daily lives of this population of women. However, since the research was begun, the fact that there is very little material culture that can be positively associated with prostitution has presented

¹ Hallett, 1993, 52.

itself as a major obstacle. Furthermore, when a site is excavated, it is often difficult to judge what was a brothel and what was a domestic/public/civic structure that happens to have contained erotic art. Because of this, the focus of the thesis has shifted, and I am now looking at Pompeii as a test site for assessing the methodological problems of using material culture as evidence for prostitution. In other words, the obstacle has instigated the questions for the research, and Pompeii offers an ideal subject because it is relatively well excavated and documented.

However, in order to talk about the material evidence for prostitution with any degree of intelligence, a social context based on the literary and documentary evidence must be established. Therefore, an integrated evaluation of the primary sources from antiquity will comprise the second chapter. A discussion of the primary sources from evidence both literary (such as anecdotes from the comic writers, satirists, orators, and historians) and non-literary (such as legal and papyrological) will help to form a context in which the material culture and spatial information found in the archaeological record may be placed.

From there, chapter three will include a discussion of the evidence for prostitution and erotica found in Pompeii. First, it is necessary to evaluate the material and spatial evidence for prostitution in the city by examining the known brothel and *cellae meretriciae*. Then a comparison of the material culture found in these venues to the erotica found throughout the rest of Pompeii will yield information on what distinguishes the archaeological evidence for a brothel from that for other displays of Roman sexuality. Ideally, this assessment of erotic art and material culture in Pompeii can be used as a litmus against which evidence found at other sites will be tested. The last chapter will be

my thoughts and conclusions, and I will explore whether it is possible to have an archaeology of prostitution that is independent of the archaeology of erotica in general.

This research evaluates the written sources and the material culture for prostitution in light of the theories presented below. The goal is, on one level, to examine the evidence for the presence and daily activity of prostitutes in the early Roman Empire; the literary sources can set up a context, and the material evidence will provide more information. But an even deeper goal is to look at the gender and sexual constructs that governed the daily lives of this class of women and of the men who interacted with them. As will be discussed in further detail below, those same constructs both played into and, in a large way, preserved a more general construction of gender and sexuality that influenced all Romans.

Why Study the Archeology of Prostitution?

With these goals in mind, perhaps it would be helpful to discuss why such research on prostitutes is so informative and necessary. Since the late 1970s, many classicists and (to a much lesser extent) classical archaeologists, have begun to embrace the tenets of feminist theory and apply that theoretical framework to their study of Greco-Roman antiquity. Classical archaeologist Shelby Brown posits that although feminism was slow to influence those in her field, “in the 1990s, there has been an enormous surge of interest in the study of complex social, sexual, and gendered relationships as evidenced in art and material culture.”² This increased interest both in the study of women in general, and social constructions of gender in particular, has greatly influenced the new

² Brown, 1997, 25.

generation of classicists who have entered the field as feminist theory is being embraced and integrated into most facets of scholarship. Yet this interest is part of a more general trend, and feminist theory has received much validation through the acceptance by classicists of postprocessual archaeological theory, which, among other beliefs, holds that there is more than one approach and ideology for looking at the past.³ Because of this belief, many classical archaeologists "...see a need to refigure the past...[to] reintroduc[e] real people into the past."⁴ Thus, an investigation of women's realities from Greco-Roman antiquity provides a means of "peopling" the past with a population whom the ancient sources either completely ignored or tended to caricature.

But feminist theory does not limit itself simply to the study of women in the past. Instead, there are three stages of feminist academic development, as described again by Shelby Brown:

Some feminist authors have summarized the development of feminist academic research in stages, starting with criticism of male bias (stage one), then moving on to the study of women where they have been ignored (but often still seeing the evidence from a traditionally male viewpoint; stage two), and, finally, progressing on to a broader methodological/theoretical inquiry into the dynamics of gender relations and social constructs (stage three).⁵

Different areas of classics have developed independently of each other, with social historians and scholars of literature more often interested in stage three, and those who study the material culture still researching within stage two.⁶ But the urging of art historians such as Natalie Kampen and archaeologists like Brown continually helps to

³ Hodder, 1991, Introduction.

⁴ Morris, 1994, 4.

⁵ Brown, 1993, 257.

⁶ Brown, 1997, 14.

integrate feminist theory into the study of Greco-Roman material culture. Kampen, for example, has intentionally sought, through her research, “to get some sense of women’s engagement with objects and monuments.”⁷ Women, then, do not merely exist passively in the past, but are active viewers, creators, and/or utilizers of the material culture from antiquity. Even more, “material culture has a significant role to play in presenting alternative gendered views which would help to revise ideas about the past.”⁸ This role is extremely important to the feminist researcher because even women of lower classes utilized some form of material culture. Therefore, there is much information about all women that can be gleaned from the archaeological record, maybe even more than from the written sources that were almost never created by women. For although women almost certainly interacted with the written sources in antiquity, there is little the modern scholar can do to understand how and to what degree they did this.

⁷ Kampen, 1996, 21.

⁸ Kokkinidou and Nikolaidou, 2000, 49

CHAPTER TWO – CONTEXT FOR PROSTITUTION

In order to evaluate the lives of prostitutes through the written sources, it is important first to define those sources that will be consulted. There is a wealth of information in the literary tradition, which includes such genres as comedy, satire, oratory, and history. Equally beneficial is documentary evidence, both legal and papyrological. Instead of strictly adhering to a chronological presentation, I will discuss the literary sources as they fit into the themes of comedy (or comedic representation), description of brothels, and personal attack; the documentary sources will follow a more chronological order.

Comedy

The representation of prostitutes in different forms of poetry is diverse, and differences in authors' writing styles even within the same genre further adds to the variation in how these women were portrayed. For example, the roles of the prostitute in Roman comedy are distinct from her depiction in satire or love poetry; furthermore, the individual authors in the genres, such as Plautus and Terence in comedy, manipulate the representation of the prostitute not only to show the variations between the different classes of prostitute, but also to further the aim of their work at large.

The earliest author chronologically is Plautus, who wrote in the middle to late third century BCE. His plots are fantastic and even slightly ridiculous, with mistaken identity, intentional change of identity, and discovery of true identity all being central themes of his plays. The prostitutes in his comedies play one of two roles: the passive

victim whom the other characters attempt to save or one of the deceivers trying to save another. For example, in *Pseudolus*, the title character assists his master, Calidorus, in saving from a life of prostitution Calidorus' beloved, Phoenicium, who is owned by the pimp-next-door, Ballio. Through a series of elaborate plot schemes, Pseudolus and Calidorus rescue Phoenicium by paying another slave, Simia, to impersonate the slave of the man who is to buy Phoenicium.⁹ Also, in the *Poenulus*, a young man attempts to save a young woman about to be sold into slavery from the evil pimp who stole her from her respectable Carthaginian family.

In other plays of Plautus, such as the *Miles Gloriosus*, the *meretrix* is portrayed as a conniver, a woman who helps men with their plots in order to gain money for herself. In fact, Acroteleutium, the *meretrix* in this particular play, openly declares that she, as a woman and a prostitute, uses her wiles for the purpose of deception and that she was the one who created the plan to deceive the arrogant soldier:

*stultitia atque insipientia mea istaec sit, <mi patrone,>
me ire in opus alienum aut [t]ibi meam operam pollicitari,
si ea in opificina nesciam aut mala esse aut fraudulenta?*¹⁰

Now don't you think that I'd be a stupid idiot to undertake an unfamiliar project or to promise you results, if I were unacquainted with the whole technique - the art of being wicked?¹¹

meretricem commoneri
quam sane magni referat, nihil clam est. quin egomet
ultra,
postquam adbibere aures meae tuam oram orationis,
tibi dixi, miles quem ad modum potisset deasciarei.¹²

⁹Plautus *Comoediae* (II): *Pseudolus* ln 956-1016. Nixon (ed.) IV.i-IV.ii.

¹⁰Plautus Comodiae (II): Miles Gloriosus In 878-880. Nixon (ed.) III.ii.

¹¹Slavitt and Bowie (eds). *Plautus: The Comedies*, vol I: *The Braggart Soldier*. 130. Erich Segal (trans).

¹²Plautus *Comoediae* (II): *Miles Gloriosus* ln 88I-884. Nixon (ed.) III.ii

Not to a real professional - a layman's words are of little use. Why, didn't I myself, the moment I drank the smallest drop of your proposal, didn't *I* tell *you* the way the soldier could be swindled?¹³

Plautus is obviously representing this woman as useful, as she is going to use her talents to help the protagonists; nevertheless, she is depraved and self-serving, more interested in the pay-off than in conveying any feeling of good-will. Yet not all *meretrices* in Plautus are interested only in money (at least, not exclusively), even if they are all represented as conniving and sneaky. For example, in the *Bacchides*, the twin courtesans (both named Bacchis) are connivers, but they are scheming in order to allow the Bacchis from Samos to stay in Athens with her sister. Despite their intention, however, they make it clear that they are still interested in making money.¹⁴

In addition to these explicit representations of prostitutes within comedy, the pimp's relationship with the prostitute also reveals some attitudes towards both professions. Usually, the pimp is represented as the most loathsome character in the play; for that reason, he is often the one against whom the plots are created. For the general attitude toward pimps, consider the following exchange between two characters in the play *Curculio*:

Palinurus (PA): *iam iam novi: leno est Cappadox.*
 Congrediar. Cappadox (CA): *salve, Palinure.* PA: *o scelerum caput,*
Salveto. Quid agis? CA: *vivo.* PA: *nempe ut dignis es.*
Sed quid tibi est? CA: *lien enicat, renes dolent,*
Pulmones distrahuntur, cruciatur iecur,
Radices cordis pereunt, hira omnes dolent.
 PA: *tum te igitur morbus agitat hepaticarius.*
 CA: *facile est miserum inridere.*¹⁵

PA: it's Cappadox the pimp. I'll chat with him.
 CA: Good day, Palinurus.
 PA: Greetings, scumbag, how goes it?
 CA: I'm living.

¹³Slavitt and Bowie (eds). *Plautus: The Comedies, vol 1: The Braggart Soldier*. 130. Erich Segal (trans).

¹⁴Plautus. *Bacchides*. James Tatum (trans). Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983. 22-24

¹⁵Plautus *Comoediae (I): Curculio* In 233-240. Nixon (ed.) II.i

PA: As you well deserve. But what's the matter with you?

CA: My spleen is swollen, my kidneys hurt, my lungs are in tatters, my liver's in agony, my heart-cords are slack, my guts are in tangles.

PA: A liver problem, probably, yours or one you ate.

CA: Fine, make cheap fun of misery.¹⁶

The character, Palinurus, obviously does not show any respect or even concern for the health problems of the pimp, Cappadox. The other characters routinely treat the *leno* characters hatefully; given the actions of these *lenones*, however, it is not surprising that they are so hated. The *leno* Ballio, in the play *Pseudolus*, threatens his prostitutes unless they bring in enough money:

*facite hodie ut mihi munera multa huc ab amatoribus
convenient. Nam nisi mihi penus annuos hodie convenit,
cras populo prostituam vos.*¹⁷

Have your clients bring in birthday presents galore! For today we lay in one year's bread, drink, and meat, or tomorrow I'll have you out walking the street.¹⁸

Terence's plots tend to be more complex than those of Plautus; as a result, the overall representation of prostitution is slightly different. For example, in his most famous work, the *Eunuchus*, the *meretrix*, Thais, is similar to the Bacchis sisters, who manipulate the plot, though not altogether for money-making purposes. Chaerea and his brother, Phaedria, live next door to Thais, who recently discovered that her slave, the virgin Pamphila, is a free-born citizen. She willingly contacts Pamphila's brother, Chremes, so that she can reunite the girl with her family. Just as with the Bacchis sisters, there is a noble aim to her manipulation, that is, the freedom of her slave. However, as stated below, she has an ulterior motive for her kindness:

primum quod soror est dicta; praeterea ut suis

¹⁶ Slavitt and Bowie (eds). *Plautus: The Comedies, vol 1: The Weevil*. 342. Henry Taylor (trans).

¹⁷ Plautus *Comoediae* (II): *Pseudolus* In 177-178. Nixon (ed.) I.ii

¹⁸ Casson (ed and trans). *The Menaechmus Twins & Two Other Plays*. 82.

*restitutam ac reddam. sola sum; habeo hic neminem
neque amicum neque cognatum: quam ob rem, Phaedria,
cupido aliquos parere amicos beneficio meo.*¹⁹

First, she is my sister, so to say. Then second, I want to be the one who brings her back safe to her family's bosom. I'm on my own in Athens; I don't have powerful friends or family here. But by that act of altruism, I can win an entry, some backing, and all through a labor of love.²⁰

Thais is not completely self-serving in her desire to return Pamphila to her family, yet she is not altogether self-sacrificing either. Her motivations are two-fold, not wholly virtuous, nor completely depraved, an interesting depiction of a woman who receives gifts or money for sex, but is not indiscriminate in her number of lovers.²¹ Nonetheless, the amount of work and deception that was necessary to free Pamphila from Thraso was extraordinary. As a reward, Thais receives the security that she had hoped for when she undertook to reunite the girl:

*Chaerea: Thais patri se commendavit; in clientelam et fidem
nobis dedit se. Parmeno: fratris igitur Thais tostas? CH:
scilicet.*²²

Chaerea: Thais has entrusted herself to my father; she gave herself to us in clientelship and faith. Parmeno: And so Thais is entirely your brother's? CH: Clearly.²³

In the end, her hard work is compensated not only with the financial security that she so desired, but she can enjoy it with the man she loves.

Terence also depicts the 'hooker with a heart of gold' in his play, the *Hecyra*. As with all of Terence's works, the plot is very complicated and difficult to summarize briefly; in short, a young man, Pamphilus, unknowingly raped his future wife, Philumena, three months before they were married; during the attack, he stole her ring and gave it to

¹⁹Terence. *Comoediae: Eunuchus* In 146-149. W.M. Lindsay (ed.) l.ii

²⁰Bovie, Carrier, and Parker, 1974, 161

²¹In lines 121-128, Thais explains that she always was involved in pseudo-monogamous relationships with men; she was a 'kept' woman. She would only take on another relationship when her former one was terminated.

²²Terence. *Comoediae: Eunuchus* In 1039-1040. W.M. Lindsay (ed.) V.vii

²³my own translation

reuniting him with his wife. Thus, Bacchis surpasses the other “women of her sort” in virtue, and the play ends with her as a heroine.

How do these depictions of prostitution in comedy from Republican Rome fit into a context for the early Roman Empire? Admittedly, comedy is a difficult genre to turn to for information on Roman social constructions in general. First, many of the plays are adaptations or even (in a few cases) nearly direct translations into Latin of Greek New Comedy plays, especially those of Menander. The degree to which they are direct translations or adaptations varies between the two authors. David Wiles states that Terence's “plays are more closely based on Greek texts,”²⁶ while “the plays of Plautus are more numerous, more varied and more obviously Roman.”²⁷ W.S. Anderson suggests that Plautus deviates more from the common trend found in Menander, notably, “that Plautus tampers with the romantic love plots”²⁸ by downplaying the love between spouses and accentuating the relationship between the men and the *meretrix*. He goes on to make a case for Terence adapting (and presumably Romanizing) Menander, stating, that Terence, by concocting elaborate dual love plots, “exhibits significant alteration, not merely of the mood of the original [plays], but of the scheme.”²⁹ Therefore, it can be asserted that both Plautus and Terence wrote (or adapted) plays to which a Roman audience could relate. The other problematic aspect of comedy is the disparity in time between the period when these plays were written (late third to mid-second century BCE) and the period on which this research focuses (approximately 29 BCE to mid-second century CE). However, I would argue that the stereotypes and caricatures of prostitutes

²⁶ Wiles, 1989, 39.

²⁷ Wiles, 1989, 40.

²⁸ Anderson, 1984, 128.

²⁹ Anderson, 1984, 130.

portrayed by these early comic writings had a great deal of influence on the stereotypes that prevailed later in other genres, such as history and satire. In fact, Livy's portrayals of prostitutes in his history are recognizably comic.

Comedic Representation in Livy

Prostitutes play a role in even the earliest recorded events in Roman historiography. At times, the prostitutes are depicted as heroines, or victims, or even as women who were shameful; such archetypes can be attributed to the ancient historian's interest in writing as much for sake of literature as much as for historical "fact." The fascinating aspect of the historical texts, however, is that the prostitute is present from the very founding of the city through imperial times, over nearly a millennium of history, and her presence is almost always in some form of comedic representation.

When discussing Roman historiography, the first author to come to mind is often Livy. In his impressive history, *Ab Urbe Condita*, he maps out about six centuries of Roman history, from the city's mythical founding by Romulus through Augustan Rome. Throughout the centuries, there are three rather important incidents in which the presence of a prostitute greatly influences political development. Even within the mythical stories, the prostitute makes her appearance, and she is one of the most important characters in the story. Twin brothers, Romulus and Remus, were exposed at birth because of the jealousy and tyranny of their great-uncle. However,

tenet fama, cum fluitantem alveum quo expositi erant pueri tenuis in sicco aqua destituisset, lupam sitientem ex monibus qui circa sunt ad puerilem vagitum cursum flexisse; eam summissas infantibus adeo mitem prae buisse mammas ut lingua lambentem pueros magister regii pectoris invenerit – Faustulo fuisse nomen ferunt. Ab eo ad

stabula Larentiae uxori educandos datos. Sunt qui Larentiam vulgato corpore lupam inter pastores vocatam putent.

The story persists that when the floating basket in which the children had been exposed was left high and dry by the receding water, a she-wolf, coming down out of the surrounding hills to slake her thirst, turned her steps toward the cry of the infants, and with her teats gave them suck so gently, that the keeper of the royal flock found her licking them with her tongue. Tradition assigns to this man the name of Faustulus, and adds that he carried the twins to his hut and gave them to his wife Larentia to rear. Some think that Larentia, having been free with her favors, had got the name “she-wolf” among the shepherds.³⁰

In Latin, the word, *lupa*, has dual meanings; whereas it can mean “she-wolf,” the term can also refer to prostitutes.³¹ Livy identifies this etymological relationship between the two and draws attention to the connection between the “she-wolf” who was responsible for the twins’ survival and the prostitute who provided for their needs and raised them into adulthood. In addition, Livy, ever the pragmatist in his historical reporting, is admitting the unlikelihood of the twins having been rescued by an actual wolf; the more reasonable explanation is that a prostitute came across the abandoned babies and took them in.

Livy also includes a rather odd story in book two of his history. Throughout the first two books of his work, rape is a common theme. Almost always, the consequence of these rapes is a major political or cultural change. In book one, the men whom Romulus allowed to live in his city decided to invite the Sabines to Rome for games. When they arrived, the Romans snatched away the maidens and made them their wives. The eventual result of this massive abduction, and subsequent war, was the unification of the

³⁰ Livy. *Ab Urbe Condita*. I.6-8. B.O. Foster (ed and trans). 18-19.

³¹ Note the connection with one of the terms for a brothel, ‘lupanar.’

two peoples into one. In addition, there is a connection between the snatching of the Sabine women and the rape of Lucretia. Although Lucretia was raped in the modern sense of the word (meaning that she was forced to have intercourse against her will), there is a connection between her forced submission to the desires of Sextus Tarquinius and the forced submission of the Sabine women to the power of their Roman husbands. In addition, Lucretia's rape by the king's son led to the overthrow of the monarchy and the establishment of the Republic, a political change due to the violation of a woman. A much less well-known account also appears in book two:

Insequens annus Postumum Cominium et T. Largium consules habuit. Eo anno Romae, cum per ludos ab Sabinorum iuventute per lasciviam scorta raperentur, concursu hominum rixa ac prope proelium fuit, parvaque ex re ad rebellionem spectare videbatur. Super belli Sabini metum id quoque accesserat, quod triginta iam coniurasse populos concitante Octavio Mamilio satis constabat. In hac tantarum expectatione rerum sollicita civitate dictatoris primum creandi mentio orta.

The next year had Postumus Cominius and T. Largius as consuls. In this year at Rome, when during the games harlots were carried off, there was a quarrel and almost a battle, and from a small thing seemed to look towards a renewal of war. It was also added that it was sufficiently agreed that thirty tribes had plotted together when stirred up by Octavius Mamilius. In the atmosphere of such monumental things, the citizens worried, and there first arose discussion of creating a dictator.³²

There are two points of interest in this passage. First, as James Arieti points out, "what is important... is that this major constitutional development, the dictatorship, is also preceded by rape."³³ Thus, just as the beginning of the Roman Republic was precipitated

³² Livy. *Ab Urbe Condita*. II. 18.2-4. B.O. Foster (ed and trans). 274-275.

³³ Arieti, 1997, 214

by the infamous rape of Lucretia, so was the addition of a dictator as a possible military leader preceded by the violation or snatching of women. Livy again shows a connection between the rape of women and the need for a political change in order to highlight the cultural decadence that would allow for such a thing to happen. However, in this case, the women are not respectable daughters of a neighboring people, or even the noble wives of men of high status; rather, these are women of ill-repute, ones who are associated with the act of sex by the nature of their occupation. It seems almost comical that the Romans would be willing to start a war over the drunken antics of their allies, when they themselves conspired to steal respectable women and keep them indefinitely as their wives. It is not surprising that Livy does not give this episode the same degree of gravity that he does the rape of the Sabine women. In this passage, when he refers to the rape of the prostitutes, he states that “from a small thing seemed to look towards a renewal of war.” He appears to be less interested in the violation of the prostitutes than in the Romans’ interest in renewing the war. His depiction of the events leads the reader to view this episode as a second-rate repeat of the rape of the Sabines, with the Sabine youths participating in a ridiculous reenactment, and the Romans completely overreacting; the entire story seems a bit fantastic and overwhelmingly ridiculous.

Another mention of prostitution in Livy refers to the action of an individual prostitute, an action that, again, had important political implications. Livy states that the mysteries of the Bacchanalia were brought over from Greece to Rome by a priest, who initiated women into the secret cult. Over time, it had metamorphosed, including changes that would allow men to join. Eventually, with the addition of feasting and drinking, the rites became little more than decadent orgies. However, the participants became ever

more violent, with both men and women beginning to participate in licentious, shameful sexual acts. Consider Livy's depiction of a certain Roman youth, Aebutius, who was under the care of his mother and stepfather because his father was dead:

Scortum nobile libertina Hispala Faecenia, non digna quaestu cui ancillula adsuerat, etiam postquam manumissa erat, eodem se genere tuebatur. Huic consuetudo iuxta vicinitatem cum Aebutio fuit, minime adolescentis aut rei aut famae damnosa: ultro enim amatus appetitusque erat et maligne omnia praebeantibus suis meretriculae munificentia sustinebatur.

There was a well-known courtesan, a freedwoman named Hispala Faecenia, not worthy of the occupation to which, while still a mere slave, she had accustomed herself, and even after she had been manumitted she maintained herself in the same way. Between her and Aebutius, since they were neighbors, an intimacy developed, not at all damaging either to the young man's fortune or to his reputation: for he had been loved and sought out without any effort on his part, and, since his own relatives made provisions for all his needs on a very small scale, he was maintained by the generosity of the courtesan.³⁴

Aebutius' stepfather no longer wanted to provide for him, so he conspired with Aebutius' mother to have him initiated into the Bacchic rites. However, Hispala had been initiated when she was still a slave; therefore, she was privy to the activities of the mystery cult, and she had witnessed both torture and murder occurring at the Bacchanalia (or so she said). After she warned Aebutius, and he refused initiation, he was driven from his home. Eventually, he told the consul Postumius the entire story, and Postumius launched an investigation, starting with the questioning of Hispala. Her initial terror at revealing

³⁴ Livy *Ab Urbe Condita* XXXIX. xviii.5-7. Evan T. Sage (ed. and trans.) 245.

the secrets of the cult was followed by her confession of all the atrocities associated with the festival. Postumius promised her safety:

*Ita cum indices ambo in potestate essent, rem ad
senatum Postumius defert, omnibus ordine expositis,
quae delata primo, quae deinde ab se inquisita forent.*

When both witnesses were thus available, Postumius laid the matter before the senate, everything being set forth in detail; first what had been reported, then what he had himself found out.³⁵

In one sense, this representation of Hispala Faecenia closely resembles one of the depictions of the prostitute in Roman comedy, that is, the hooker with a heart of gold. Hispala knows that she is placing herself in danger by revealing the secrets of the cult both to Aebutius and to Postumius. However, her love and concern for Aebutius' safety overcomes the fear for her own security. As a result, the entire Bacchanalia scandal is put to an end, saving countless lives, and also earning Hispala the right to marry her true love, as she is given "the right to marry outside of her gens (*gentis enuptio*)"³⁶ through a decree of the senate. Her actions are construed as both brave and selfless, and she also earns the ability to be permanently united with the man she was trying to protect. Adele Scafuro reflects on how this ending reads like the summary of a plot from a generic New Comedy:

an upper class young man falls in love with a prostitute; the young man has lost his money, the prostitute is generous and kind; in the end, the young man will get back his money and will be able to marry the prostitute: a way will be found legally for her to marry the young man, and so the marriage will be above reproach.³⁷

³⁵ Livy *Ab Urbe Condita* XXXIX. xiv.3. Evan T. Sage (ed. and trans.) 245.

³⁶ Livy *Ab Urbe Condita* XXXIX. xix.3. Evan T. Sage (ed and trans) 249.

³⁷ Scafuro, 1989, 126.

As a specific example of her statement, consider how this ending is very reminiscent of the uniting of Thais and Phaedria in the denouement of Terence's *Eunuchus*. P.G. Walsh also suggests that temporal similarities may provide a key as to why Livy's account of the Bacchanalia scandal so closely resembles comedy. Plautus' *Casina*, which was published in 184 BCE, makes a mention of Bacchic activity no longer being present (presumably in Rome); the scandal itself took place in 186 BCE, just two years prior.³⁸ This and other comic references in Plautus to the Bacchanalia could have encouraged Livy to enliven his account with comic elements.

Livy's representation of prostitution is fascinating because it incorporates views and stereotypes of his own time (during the reign of Augustus) and imposes them on characters from history. Both Larentia and Hispala Faecenia are portrayed as golden-hearted whores. In all three episodes, Livy puts forward the view an idea that prostitutes are an integral part of Roman society, and as such, contribute to the development of the political system in Rome. Larentia rears the twins who will eventually found the city, and the rape of the harlots leads to the formation of the position of dictator. The selfless courage of Hispala Faecenia ends a scandal and, ironically enough, puts a stop to immoral sexual activity in the city. The representation of these prostitutes is just as stereotypical as those in comedy and satire, showing that for Livy, the importance of writing literary work was just as (if not more) important as contributing to what we might now call the historical discourse of Rome. For modern scholars, these representations provide invaluable information for male attitudes toward those women that they encountered within the brothels.

³⁸ Walsh, 1996, 190-191.

Description of Brothels

Both comedy and satirical writers provide modern scholars with information beyond literary depictions of prostitutes' characters; they also describe the interior details and the location of brothels relative to other parts of the city, even if they are done in exaggeration. The problematic aspects of comedy are detailed above. The information from satire should be considered quite questionable because of the aims and motivations of satirical writing. As Niall Rudd explains, "Roman satirists may be thought of as functioning within a triangle of which the apices are (a) attack, (b) entertainment, and (c) preaching."³⁹ Given the nature of these three aims, then, it is hard to determine when the satirist is grossly exaggerating the truth or when he is addressing genuine social practices of his culture. For the purpose of this research, the assumption will be that if the satirist wished to attack, make fun of, or preach about a certain quality of Roman culture, then he must represent the characteristic in some way that is recognizable to his audience. As J.P. Sullivan states, "Caution then is advisable in any study of Martial's obscene poems, but still the poet is bound in such realistic epigrams to reveal something of himself, of his society, and his patrons, if only by the subjects that he chooses and those he avoids."⁴⁰ Therefore, looking at the evidence for prostitution within the satirical writers should prove a fruitful endeavor yielding many descriptions about the everyday lives of prostitutes in their environment.

One of the earliest mentions in classical literature of the brothel itself is actually in comedy. Terence, in the *Eunuchus*, describes a "whore's house" as the following:

³⁹ Rudd, 1986, 1.

⁴⁰ Sullivan, 1979, 292.

*an id flagitiumst si in domum meretriciam
 deducar et illis crucibu', quae nos nostramque
 adolescentiam
 habent despiciatam et quae nos semper omnibus cruciant
 modis
 nunc referam gratiam atque eas itidem fallam, ut ab is
 fallimur?*⁴¹

Parmeno, this is a whorehouse. It shelters tools of torture who take our youth and fling it away, who torment us in every possible fashion. Place me inside to pay them back, to victimize them as they do us - is this a crime?⁴²

In this quotation, the brothel is portrayed almost as a chamber of terror, a place where torture and other horrors take place. As a consequence, one thinks of the prostitutes who reside inside the brothel as torturers; the building appears to take on the characteristics of a painful love, be it the result of a conniving prostitute or a love that can never be actualized (though ironically, in comedy, it almost always is). What is doubly interesting is the contrast that Horace (who wrote in about 35 BCE) supplies:

*contra alius nullam nisi olenti in fornice stantem.
 quidam notus homo cum exiret fornice, "macte
 virtute esto" inquit sententia dia Catonis:
 "nam simul ac venas inflavit taetra libido,
 huc iuvenes aequum est descendere, non alienas
 permolere uxores."*

Another is found only with such as live in a foul brothel. When from such a place a man he knew was coming forth, "A blessing on thy well-doing!" runs Cato's revered utterance; "for when shameful passion has swelled the veins, 'tis well that young men come down hither, rather than tamper with [lit. grind] other men's wives."⁴³

Horace's Cato praises men for utilizing these buildings to fulfill their sexual desires.

This image of a brothel, and consequently those who work within it, is quite a different

⁴¹ Terence *Comoediae: Eunuchus* In 382-385. W.M. Lindsay (ed.) p 1.ii

⁴² Bovie, Carrier, and Parker, 1974, 176.

⁴³ Horace *Satires* 1.ii. 30-35. Fairclough (ed. and trans.) 20-21.

one from what is found in Terence. Terence presents a veritable house of horror, while Horace's Cato describes a brothel as a place that helps uphold honorable Roman sexual *mores*. Horace also gives the reader valuable insight into one of the types of man that frequents a brothel; presumably, if Cato recognized the young man, he was of high status.

For more explicit descriptions of the inside of a brothel, Petronius and Juvenal supply the best examples. Approximately a generation before Juvenal, Petronius penned a very vivid description of a brothel. Although this episode is valuable primarily for its description of the location, Petronius conveys a distinctive atmosphere that will be repeated by Juvenal. Encolpius has lost track of his friend. Being a visitor to Baiae and unfamiliar with the town, Encolpius enlists the help of an elderly female fruit vendor to lead him to his inn:

delectata est illa urbanitate tam stulta et 'quidni sciam?' inquit consurrexitque et coepit me praecedere. divinam ego putabam et subinde ut in locum secretiorem venimus, centonem anus urbana reiecit et 'hic' inquit 'debes habitare'. cum ego negarem me agnoscere domum, video quasdam inter titulos nudas[que] meretrices furtim spatiantes. tarde, immo iam sero intellexi me in fornicem esse deductum.

She was delighted by such a stupid attempt at wit and proceeded to show the way. I thought she was a seer...we quickly arrived at an out-of-the-way place, and the crone threw back a patch-work curtain and said, "Here's a place for you to live." While I was telling her that I didn't recognize the house, I saw placards advertising sex acts, and there were men⁴⁴, and naked prostitutes slinking around. At last, too late, I understood that the old woman had led me into a brothel.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ This phrase seems to have been added by the translator.

⁴⁵ Sarah Ruden, 2000, pp 5-6.

Obviously, the woman on the street was some sort of *lena*, or madam, who leads (or lures) men to brothel. The more important features of this description are the waysz it places the brothel within the context of the town, and how it reveals the public nature of the prostitutes themselves. The location of the brothel is described as an out-of-the-way place (*locum secretiorem*), yet the prostitutes are visible to the passer-bys on the street.

In the following episode (that will be quoted again later in this thesis as a form of personal attack), Juvenal details the nocturnal behaviors of emperor Claudius' wife, Messalina, the *meretrix Augusta* or imperial whore:⁴⁶

*intravit calidum veteri centone lupanar
et cellam vacuum atque suam; tunc nuda papillis
prostitit auratis titulum mentita Lyciscae...⁴⁷
foeda lupanaris tulit ad pulvinar odorem.⁴⁸*

She entered the brothel, warm with an old bed-spread, and she entered also her own empty cell; then, she stood naked in the open with golden nipples, falsely advertising under the sign of Lycisca...she foully bore back to the couch [of Claudius] the stench of the brothel.⁴⁹

Through Juvenal's highly sensory language, a vivid vision of this brothel emerges. The cell is impersonal, having been "much-used," while the air is warm and stale. The stench of perpetual use permeates the scene; indeed, the Juvenal twice emphasizes the presence of a foul smell (*foeda* and *odorem*) that permeates the scene. The presence of this smell is made even more pungent because the words *foeda* and *odorem* surround the other words in the line. Notice how Juvenal's description of Messalina in the doorway of her cell coincides with Petronius' picture of prostitutes slinking about the thresholds of their

⁴⁶ Juvenal *Satires* VI. 118. Ferguson (ed) 37.

⁴⁷ Juvenal *Satires* VI. 121-123. Ferguson (ed) 37.

⁴⁸ Juvenal *Satires* VI. 132. Ferguson (ed) 37.

⁴⁹ My translation.

brothel. The naked body of the prostitute is made public and common, even if the brothel is in an alley (as in Petronius). As Roman city planning is discussed, we shall see below that both of these descriptions are congruent with the archaeological evidence. Furthermore, these two sources add a personal level to the impersonal building, as the reader can imagine and sense the atmosphere of the brothel.

Personal Attack

In addition to descriptions of brothels, satire also provides numerous examples of invective; Juvenal and to an even larger extent, Martial, both use such themes as prostitution, sexual licentiousness, and even lesbianism as slander against their contemporaries. Martial provides a fine example of the use of invective against a peer's mother or wife/lover as a way to embarrass him. For example, in Epigram II.39, Martial admonishes a man for bestowing lavish gifts upon his lover. He offers the following advice:

*Coccina famosae donas et ianthina moechae:
vis dare quae meruit munera? mitte togam.*⁵⁰

You give scarlet and violet colored garments to an infamous adulteress: Do you wish to give her a present which she earned? Send her a toga.

Again, this poem is a form of name-calling invective, though it is against an unnamed woman. The important theme here is that the distinction between prostitutes and adulteresses is being blurred.⁵¹ As will be discussed below, most authors intentionally forged a connection between the two populations of women. The result is that modern

⁵⁰ Martial *Epigrams* II.39. Bailey (ed and trans.), vol. 1 p 160. The translation is my own.

⁵¹ For discussion on the wearing of togas by prostitutes (and adulteresses), see Gardner, 1986, 251-252.

scholars have a hard time differentiating between the real prostitutes, who should have registered with the aediles, and the loose women who engaged in licentious sexual revelry. An example from Juvenal was cited above, namely, the crude description of Messalina and her participation in prostitution. Messalina was a notoriously licentious woman, even going so far as to divorce her husband, the emperor Claudius, while he was away and to marry her lover.⁵² However, nowhere in the historical evidence is there any mention of her actually becoming involved in prostitution.

It would be misleading to imply that this form of “name-calling” is limited to the genre of satire. Orators, such as Cicero, and historians such as Cicero’s contemporary, Sallust, utilize this type of invective against women of high status and questionable *mores*. These authors blur the line between a woman who exchanged sex for money or gifts and a woman who took part in licentious love affairs and received gifts or money from their lovers. Unfortunately for the modern scholar, the distinction is not always clear for the precise reason that the ancient authors imposed the characteristics of a prostitute on women of high status who overstepped their traditional sexual boundaries.

The first author to employ this tactic was Cicero, the famous Roman orator and statesman. Cicero was known for his ingenious use of rhetoric which was displayed in his many speeches, including *Pro Caelio*, written in defense of a young Roman aristocrat, Marcus Caelius Rufus in 56 BCE. Caelius stood accused of being involved in a plot to kill a certain Dio⁵³ (an ambassador from Egypt) and of attempting to poison his former lover, Clodia.⁵⁴ Their affair had come to a bitter end. Caelius became involved in this

⁵² Suetonius *Life of Claudius* XXVI.3 and XXIX. 1.

⁵³ Cicero *Pro Caelio* x.23-xi.27. R. Gardner (trans), 1958, 432-439.

⁵⁴ Cicero *Pro Caelio* xxv.61-xxix.69. R. Gardner (trans), 1958, 482-493.

sexual tryst with the widow Clodia, the sister of Publius Clodius, after renting a room from Clodius. As the strategy for his defense, Cicero prefers to attack Clodia, whom he calls, while addressing the prosecutor, “the very fountainhead of your case (*ipsus caput accusationis vestrae*).”⁵⁵ Indeed, in the very beginning of the speech, Cicero states “that [Caelius] is being attacked by the wealth of a courtesan (*oppugnari autem opibus meretriciis*).”⁵⁶ As proof of his claims, he says that “her embraces and caresses, her beach-parties, her parties, her dinner-parties, proclaim her to be not only a courtesan, but also a shameless and wanton courtesan (*osculatione, actis, navigatione, conviviis, ut non solum meretrix, sed etiam proterva meretrix procaxque videatur*).”⁵⁷ Obviously, Cicero spares no opportunity to demonstrate the ways in which Clodia’s activities are similar to those of a *meretrix*. Without a doubt, he is attempting to persuade the jury that she is the same as a prostitute, although she is quite clearly a woman of high status who happens to live a sexually licentious lifestyle. In this way, he discredits Clodia’s character and raises sympathy for his client, Caelius.

Cicero is not the only author who intentionally blurred the lines between sexual licentiousness and prostitution. Sallust, in his *Bellum Catilinum*, explains how Catiline, the rebel who tried to seize control of the Roman state in 63 BCE, attempted to garner support for his rebellion among the noble men. Cataline tried to lure vulnerable women into supporting him:

*Quae primo ingentis sumptus stupro corporis toleraverant,
post ubi aetas tantum modo quaestui neque luxuriae
modum fecerat, aes alienum grande conflaverant. Per eas
se Catilina credebatur posse servitia urbana sollicitare,*

⁵⁵ Cicero *Pro Caelio* viii.19. R. Gardner (trans), 1958, 431.

⁵⁶ Cicero *Pro Caelio* i.1. R. Gardner (trans), 1958, 409.

⁵⁷ Cicero *Pro Caelio* i.xx.49. R. Gardner (trans), 1958, 466-67

urbem incendere, viros earum vel adjungere sibi vel interficere.

At first they had met their enormous expenses by prostitution, but later, when their time of life had set a limit to their traffic but not to their extravagance, had contracted a huge debt. Through their help, Catiline believed that he could tempt the city slaves to his side and set fire to Rome; and then either attach the women's husbands to his cause or make away with them.⁵⁸

This quotation depicts Catiline's plan to use women, especially those that were engaged in prostitution, as a way to gain popular support for his rebellion; however, the modern scholar cannot ascertain what status these women held. Sallust goes on to say

Sed in eis erat Sempronia, quae multa saepe virilis audaciae facinora commiserat. Haec mulier genere atque forma, praeterea viro atque liberis satis fortunate fuit.

Now among these women was Sempronia, who had often committed many crimes of masculine daring. In birth and beauty, in her husband also and children, she was abundantly favored by fortune.⁵⁹

Sallust names one of these women with whom Catiline allied himself, and explicitly identifies her as a woman of high status. If we recall the previous quotation, Sallust implies that she was involved in prostitution, though, like Clodia, it is more likely that she was simply sexually independent. What is not clear is Sallust's motivation for associating Sempronia with prostitution. Cicero clearly wanted to discredit and humiliate Clodia, whom he saw as the source of the charges against Caelius, while Sallust's aims remain more elusive. Perhaps by the time Sallust published this work (sometime between 44 and 40 BCE), the line separating the characteristics of adulteresses and prostitutes was already indistinguishable, at least in the literary tradition. If Livy is to be believed

⁵⁸ Sallust *Bellum Catilinum* xxiv.3-4. Rolfe (trans) 42-43.

⁵⁹ Sallust *Bellum Catilinum* xxv 1-2. Rolfe (trans) 42-43.

concerning his rendition of the Bacchanalia scandal, then Roman women of high status would have been involved in the debauchery as much as the prostitutes who participated. This, coupled with the portrayal of Clodia by Cicero, may have been one of the reasons why the distinction was hard to make. Certainly the authors of the legal sources, especially the jurists who discuss the *Lex Iulia et Papia* in the Digest of Justinian, had to grapple with the problem (as discussed below).

Law

One final example of the blurred lines between prostitution and adultery serves to show that the literary authors were not solely responsible for the confusion between these two populations of women. Tacitus, who published his *Annals* in 116 CE, relates a rather odd story about a respectable Roman woman who imposed the term “prostitute” upon herself, prompting legal recourse by the senate and the emperor, Tiberius. He states:

Eodem anno, gravibus senatus decretis libido feminarum coercita cautumque ne quaestum corpore faceret cui avus aut pater aut maritus eques Romanus fuisset. Nam Vistillia, praetoria familia genita, licentiam stupri apud aedilis vulgaverat, more inter veteres recepto, qui satis poenarum adversum impudicas in ipsa professione flagitii credebant.

In the same year [19 CE], bounds were set to female profligacy by stringent resolutions of the senate; and it was laid down that no woman should trade in her body, if her father, grandfather, or husband had been a Roman knight. For Vistillia, the daughter of a praetorian family, had advertised her venality on the aedile’s list – the normal procedure among our ancestors, who imagined the unchaste to be sufficiently punished by the avowal of their infamy.⁶⁰

⁶⁰ Tacitus *Annals* ii.85. Jackson (trans), 1931, 515.

The only women who registered with the aediles were the prostitutes who usually assumed a “professional” title.⁶¹ Presumably, the registration was necessary for both tax reasons and so that the aediles could better manage the brothels in the city, since they were in charge of public amusement in general, and the inspection of brothels specifically.⁶² Vistillia’s action may be explained by the fact that prostitutes were exempted from prosecution under the *Lex Iulia de Adulteriis Coercendis*, a law passed during the reign of Augustus intended to stop allegedly widespread adultery amongst the upper classes. Under this law (which was part of a larger set of Augustan marriage laws), Vistillia’s husband would be forced to prosecute her for adultery; if he did not, he took the risk of being prosecuted himself as a pimp.⁶³ If Vistillia were a registered prostitute, then she could not be prosecuted under the adultery law; however, her plan backfired, since Tiberius sentenced her to be “removed to the island of Seriphos (*eaque in insulam Seriphon abdita est*).”⁶⁴ Because of her trick, a more thorough law was passed to prevent women such as Vistillia from intentionally applying the word “prostitution” to their activities, which were actually “adultery.” In the end, she received the same penalty as she would have if she was convicted of adultery. Vistillia made known a loophole in the law (notably, that prostitutes could not be prosecuted for adultery) that forced the jurists to differentiate between upper-class women who were engaging in extra-marital affairs and actual prostitutes.

⁶¹ For a more complete discussion of the Roman practice of prostitute’s registering with the aediles, see McGinn, 1998, 201-202 and Evans, 1991, 140 (164 n. 151).

⁶² McGinn, 1998, 201.

⁶³ Ulpian, *Digest of Justinian* D.48.4.28(27).6.

⁶⁴ Tacitus *Annals* LXXXV. Jackson (trans), 1931, 517.

An investigation into the legal status of and/or references to prostitutes in Roman law is a cumbersome task. With so few classicists who specialize in Roman law in general, much less gender studies within the law, there is little scholarship readily available on this topic. Often, the actual legal sources have surprisingly little to say about the ubiquitous practice of prostitution. Therefore, scholars have had to look outside of the legal sources proper and evaluate the policies of emperors recorded by ancient historians and on inscriptions and papyri. By looking at all these pieces of evidence together, the modern scholar can gain a firmer grasp not just of the legal status of prostitutes as *infames personae*, but also of the distinction between them and “sluts,” a group of women who were intentionally categorized with prostitutes by literary authors and orators (as discussed above).

Infamia is the legal term attached to those persons who were employed as actors, gladiators, and prostitutes, though in a more general sense, it could be defined as belonging to a class of people who are shameful and must bear the legal ramifications of this shameful state. Catherine Edwards identifies the similarities between these different types of people as “in addition to their déclassé legal status, shar[ing] an association with various forms of sexuality constructed as deviant in ancient Roman texts.”⁶⁵ But regardless of why their professions were viewed as *infames*, the legal disabilities were rather extensive.

It seems that those who followed infamous professions were generally not permitted to speak on behalf of others in a court of law. Under most circumstances they were not permitted to bring accusations against others. They were debarred from standing for election to magistracies. Their

⁶⁵ Edwards, 1997, 77.

bodies might be beaten, mutilated, or violated with impunity.⁶⁶

Obviously, these were men and women whose worth, at least in a legal sense, was severely degraded. But in addition to professions that were placed under the stamp of *infamia*, those who shamed themselves were also given the condemnation. Adulteresses, when convicted under the Augustan adultery laws, were subject to *infamia*; however, even though their legal status may be the same as that of prostitutes, it is important to realize that they were by no means treated in the same way. Throughout his article, “*Feminae Probrosae* and the Litter,” McGinn repeatedly reminds the reader that a promiscuous upper class woman, though she may be disgraced, is not an actual legal prostitute. In fact, the terminology is quite precise; disgraced upper class women, or *feminae probrosae* (adulteresses), may have suffered some legal disabilities, but they were nothing like the disabilities of *prostitutae* or *ludicrae* (actresses), who would never have as many rights as the *feminae probrosae*, even though both were legally classified as *infames*. As McGinn so aptly states, “These three types were all socially disgraced, but this fact did not automatically translate into the same status at law.”⁶⁷ Thus, despite the tendency in literary sources to confuse these two categories of women, they were socially viewed differently if for no other reason than because the upper-class adulteresses had privileges and money to begin with. The prostitutes were *infames* because of who they were, whereas the adulteress earned the legal disadvantages by virtue of personal choices.

⁶⁶ Edwards, 1997, 66.

⁶⁷ McGinn, “*Feminae Probrosae*” (1998), 250.

One of the earliest examples we have of legal policy in regard to prostitution is the emperor Augustus' legislation on marriage and adultery. Although the intent of the laws was to preserve the sexual purity of the upper classes, they also attempted to define populations of women that were otherwise left undefined under the law during the Republic. Prostitutes were a problematic group of women as far as definitions were concerned. First, orators and literary authors (such as Cicero and Sallust) relied upon this ambiguity in order to win cases in court and to tell entertaining stories. However, when legal rights and the clear separation between the statuses became important, Augustus took great pains to clarify the boundaries. In the Digest of Justinian, the jurist Ulpian explains the definition of a prostitute as follows:

Palam quaestum facere dicemus non tantum eam, quae in lupanario se prostituit, verum etiam si qua (ut adsolet) in taberna caupona vel qua alia pudori suo non parcat. Palam autem sic accipimus passim, hic est sine dilectu: non si qua adulteris vel stupratoribus se committit, sed quae vicem prostitutae sustinet.

We would say that a woman openly practices prostitution not just where she does so in brothels but also where she is used to showing she has no shame in taverns or other places. "Openly," then, we take to mean anywhere, that is, without preference, not just a woman who commits adultery or fornication, but one who plays the part of a prostitute.⁶⁸

This definition is still rather vague; in actuality, it would have been very hard, in most cases, to tell a prostitute from a "slut," just as there could be confusion over whether a woman was a wife or concubine, with dowry and status as the only real indicators.

⁶⁸ Ulpian Digest of Justinian. D.23.43.pr-1. Watson, 1985, 662.

Another extremely important piece of imperial legislation was Caligula's tax on prostitutes. Caligula was considered by most ancient historians to have been a ruthless, savage emperor who was only interested in his own amusement and greed. A careful examination of his policies concerning prostitution both confirms and refutes this traditional point of view. The passage in Suetonius' *Life of Caligula* states:

*vectigalia nova atque inaudita...exercuit. ex capturis
prostitutarum quantum quaeque uno concubitu mereret.*

[he] imposed new and unheard of taxes...prostitutes [had to
pay] their usual fee for one act of intercourse.⁶⁹

Suetonius lists the institution of this tax within a string of other taxes that Caligula set for those people who rendered services, such as "fast food," lawsuits, and the daily wage of porters. Suetonius and Dio Cassius report that these were unpopular taxes levied by a monstrous emperor. However, modern historians are less hostile to the emperor hated by the upper class. Thomas McGinn offers two motivations for Caligula's tax, neither of which would have been appealing to the senatorial class. McGinn states that profit was the primary motivation behind the initiation of the new tax.⁷⁰ All these service-oriented workers were not taxed before Caligula, and since he needed money for his building program, the income was necessary to replenish the treasury. Another, more subtle and not-so-easily proven theory, is that Caligula was interested in "legitimizing" the occupation of prostitution to serve as a sign of his autocratic rule; McGinn rightly points out that income taxes (which is what this tax essentially was) implied that the government that was benefiting from the money would accept that occupation.⁷¹ Also, tyrants were

⁶⁹ Suetonius' *Life of Caligula* 40. My translation.

⁷⁰ McGinn, 1989, 83.

⁷¹ McGinn, 1989, 83.

renowned for imposing taxes in antiquity. McGinn seems to believe that Caligula was using the tax to announce with subtlety that he was the one ruler of Rome.

Another account in Suetonius that appears to be outlandish (even to a Caligula sympathizer such as myself) relates that Caligula set up a brothel at the imperial palace on the Palatine hill. Suetonius states:

Ac ne quod non manubiarum genus experiretur, lupanar in Palatio constituit, districtisque et instructis pro loci dignitate compluribus cellis, in quibus matronae ingenuique starent, misit circum fora et basilicas nomenclatores ad invitandos ad libidinem iuvenes senesque; praebita advenientibus pecunia faenebris appositique qui nomina palam subnotarent, quasi adiuvantium Caesari reditus.⁷²

To leave no kind of plunder untried, he opened a brothel in his palace, setting apart a number of rooms and furnishing them to suit the grandeur of the place, where matrons and freeborn youth should stand exposed. Then he sent his pages about the fora and basilicas, to invite young men and old to enjoy themselves, lending money on interest to those who came and having clerks openly take down their names, as contributors to Caesar.⁷³

McGinn argues that this brothel probably did exist.⁷⁴ First, he cites a story by Valerius Maximus (9.1.8) that tells of a certain Gemellus who, in 52 BCE, prostituted two matrons and a high-born youth at one of his dinner parties. With such a precedent, McGinn again argues that Caligula's principle motivation was to generate funds for his building projects. However, he also asserts that equating these high born women with prostitutes did help him fulfill his fantasy as well as again target the upper classes with his cruelty; it was the upper classes that criticized him openly for his prolific building projects.

⁷² Suetonius *Life of Caligula* 41.5-13.

⁷³ Rolfe, 1924, 469.

⁷⁴ McGinn, "Caligula's Brothel" (1998).

Evidence from Papyri

In addition to these examples in Rome, McGinn relies upon papyrological evidence, noting that Caligula had a precedent in some of the Roman provinces for the taxation of prostitutes. In fact, Solon, the great Athenian law-giver, set up state-run brothels as well as a very low tax on prostitutes.⁷⁵ Yet McGinn focuses mostly on the evidence from papyri found in Egypt. He does not seem to agree that Caligula was specifically influenced by the Ptolemaic prostitute tax, though he does cite Garzetti as a scholar who holds this belief. Rather, he states that Caligula's tax law did not really take effect in Egypt because it kept the Ptolemaic tax law, which entailed prostitutes giving their taxes to local tax farmers.⁷⁶ McGinn also evaluates some of the papyri (which are apparently receipts from acts of prostitution) in order to come closer to determining what the actual tax of the prostitute entailed.⁷⁷ What he concludes is that, although the tax would have had the result of discouraging part-time or marginal prostitutes because of the steep tax (payable no matter how much the prostitute worked), in Egypt, there appeared to be special part-time licenses so that a woman could be a prostitute for only a day or weekend during a festival. Because of this, he determines that prostitutes must have had a set amount to pay each month, with the government requiring a higher tax amount for the months that had major religious festivals.⁷⁸

His ideas on Caligula's tax are thought-provoking and very original; nonetheless, papyrologist Roger Bagnall is less impressed with his treatment of the Egyptian sources.

⁷⁵ Athenaeus *Deipnosophistae* XIII 568-569. Gulick (ed. and trans.), 1937, 72-75.

⁷⁶ McGinn, 1989, 94.

⁷⁷ Earlier in the article, he was trying to determine if the tax was for one sexual act per day or per month.

⁷⁸ McGinn, 1989, 96.

Bagnall criticizes McGinn for stating that he believed that Egypt was the precedent for Caligula's tax.⁷⁹ McGinn makes a general statement that some scholars (such as Garzetti) believed that Egypt influenced Caligula, but McGinn did not completely agree with Garzetti's claims that Egypt was the sole influence on Caligula's decision to impose the tax on prostitution. Again, Bagnall criticizes McGinn for accepting that certain receipts pertain to prostitution when, in actuality, the women being addressed in those fragments are not specifically identified within the papyrus as such.⁸⁰ He generally disagrees with McGinn's idea that "it is not, therefore, necessary to force all of the evidence, scattered over a considerable period, into agreement."⁸¹

C.A. Nelson takes a different approach. He prints all six possible receipts from Egypt, and discusses why three of them are probably not related to prostitution at all.⁸² In addition, he agrees with Bagnall that the Egyptians probably did not influence Caligula at all in his decision to make the tax law, for he instituted the law in 40 CE; rather, earlier classicists, like Wilcken, wanted to force these papyrological receipts to fit their ideas of Egyptian influence on the art, architecture, and culture of Rome.

Whatever the influence on Caligula to open his brothel and instituted the prostitution tax, it is evident that prostitution was a lucrative business both within Roman Italy and throughout the provinces, such as Egypt. Because of this assumption, one can expect a fair amount of material culture to remain in the archaeological record pertaining to this class of women. Thus, I begin my inquiry into the material evidence of prostitution, as found in the archaeological record.

⁷⁹ Bagnall, 1991, 5.

⁸⁰ Bagnall, 1991, 7.

⁸¹ Bagnall, 1991, 11.

⁸² Nelson 1995, 27.

CHAPTER THREE – POMPEII: A TEST CASE

Pompeii provides the perfect test site for investigating the validity of a distinct archaeology of prostitution because it is so well documented. Because the entire city is preserved due to the eruption of Vesuvius in 79 CE, Pompeii can be studied as a whole city, allowing archaeologists to examine the spatial relationships between the different types of structures. Often these relationships will give insight into the cultural constructions of the populations who inhabited those structures. The erotic paintings and graffiti found on a variety of structures, such as bath complexes and houses, allow the archaeologist access to a wealth of information about the presence of sexual themes in everyday life. Evaluating these objects in relation to those that are known to be associated with prostitution will help archaeologists to study prostitution through the archaeological record.

Brothels

Location

One piece of information that can be gleaned from the archaeological record is the placement of brothels within the urban design of Pompeii. Where were the brothels located? How many were there? (An early estimation produced a figure of 34 brothels in Pompeii alone.) How does their position in the city compare with other structures, such as public spaces, civic buildings, and houses? Because of the paucity of evidence for prostitution that survives from antiquity, it is difficult even to define a brothel. For the purposes of this research, Andrew Wallace-Hadrill's criteria for identifying a *lupanar* (brothel) and the *cellae meretriciae* (whore-cells) will suffice:

The most reliable [criterion for determine whether a structure is a brothel] is the structural evidence of a masonry bed set in a small cell of ready access to the public; the second is the presence of paintings of explicit sexual scenes; the third is a cluster of graffiti of the *'hic bene futui'* type.⁸³

The *cellae meretriciae* differ in scale alone from the *lupanaria*. They are small, one-room cells that have a masonry bed and open directly onto the street, rather crude structures that were presumably used as a place for street-walking prostitutes and their frequent customers. Given these criteria for *lupanaria* and *cellae meretriciae*, the number of the structures in Pompeii is reduced from an exorbitant 34 to a more reasonable one brothel and nine *cellae meretriciae*.⁸⁴

This lone brothel is situated in a rather interesting area of Pompeii. Although technically removed from any main thoroughfare, it was nonetheless only about two *insulae* from the forum and three *insulae* from the theater complex (see figure 1).

Wallace-Hadrill accounts for this distinct placement of the brothel by quoting the Roman moralist, Seneca:

*Virtutem in templo convenies, in foro in curia, pro murus stantem, pulverulentam coloratum, callosas habentem manus: Voluptatem latitantem saepius ac tenebras captantem circa balinea ac sudatoria ac loca aedilem metuentia, mollem enervem, mero atque unguento madentem, pallidam aut fucatam et medicamentis pollinctam.*⁸⁵

Virtue you will meet in the temple, the forum and the senate house, standing before the walls, stained with dust, with callused hands; pleasure you will find lurking and hanging around in the shadows, round the baths and saunas and places that fear the aedile, soft and gutless, soaked in

⁸³ Wallace-Hadrill, 1995, 52.

⁸⁴ Wallace-Hadrill, 1995, 53.

⁸⁵ Seneca *De vita beata* 7.3, cited in Wallace-Hadrill, 1995, 57.

liquor and perfume, pale and plastered with the makeup and medicaments of the funeral parlor.⁸⁶

Seneca refers to the appropriate location for the selling of trade goods away from the public areas of temples and government buildings, for it was improper for a Roman gentleman to be directly involved in such ventures. With this ideal in mind, the Romans developed a form of urban planning that would allow the places of the *infames* (a brothel, for instance) to be accessible to the public while not being actually next to any important public building. Indeed, the only public building that is next to the brothel is the Stabian baths, yet even then, it is the rear entrance that is across the street from the brothel, while the facade faces the Via dell' Abbondanza.⁸⁷ But as figure 1 demonstrates, though this brothel was distanced from the rather wealthy residential district (regio VI), the two roads on which the brothel lay provided access to the center of civic life (the forum) and an entertainment complex (the theater and odeon). Naturally, if the aediles were intentionally restricting the business of the *infames* to particular alleys in a certain part of town, it would be consistent for them to place prostitutes in the company of actors, who were their legal equals.

But the presence of a brothel in this area does not necessarily imply that it was used very often. As stated above, while the roads that intersected the brothel led to the forum and the theater, this intersection was “made by the meeting of an irregular north-south street [Vicolo del Lupanare, which ran behind the Stabian Baths] and a narrow east-west one.”⁸⁸ How much foot traffic was there on the roads surrounding the brothel, and how public was the location? Ray Laurence evaluates this very issue in his article,

⁸⁶ Wallace-Hadrill (trans), 1995, 39.

⁸⁷ Wallace-Hadrill, 1995, 55.

⁸⁸ Clarke, 1998, 196.

“The Organization of Space in Pompeii.” He states that on “each street we know where doorways were that opened onto the street. These mark the interface between public and private space.”⁸⁹ He measured the degree of public activity on each street based on three characteristics: the frequency at which there are doors that open onto the street, the presence and amount of graffiti on the walls, and the types of doorways found.⁹⁰ Based on these criteria, the roads that led to and from the brothel would appear to have a large amount of traffic, with the Vicolo del Lupanare bringing in more traffic than the narrow street that led to the forum. Figure 2 shows that there were doorways opening onto both streets every 0-4 meters, while figure 3 shows that graffiti was more prominent on the Vicolo del Lupanare than on the small alley street that led to the forum. The only real anomaly was in the type of doorway that opened onto the street. The brothel could be entered three ways: n. 18, which led into a small corridor from the Vicolo del Lupanare; n. 19, which opened into a smaller corridor from the small east-west street; and n.20, which led to a staircase that led to more *cellae* (see figure 4). All of these entrances fall into the “type 1” category, meaning that they do not open from the street directly into the rooms.⁹¹ Instead, there are corridors and stairs, all meant to provide a small bit of privacy to the prostitute and client. Indeed, compare the presence of the Priapus painting on the right as one enters the brothel from n. 18 (figure 5) with the Priapus painting that is found in the *fauces* of the House of the Vettii (figure 6). Both of these paintings were placed in the areas immediately preceding the opening of the structures, and in both cases,

⁸⁹ Laurence, 1995, 66.

⁹⁰ Laurence, 1995, 66-72.

⁹¹ Laurence, 1995, 72.

Priapus is guarding the house from the evil eye, while also helping with sexual prowess.⁹² The presence of this god in the liminal spaces of these two structures seems to connect the two architecturally, giving the brothel a degree of privacy that was usually associated with the atrium houses.

Graffiti

The modern scholar can get a feel for the clientele that frequented the brothel by examining the surrounding graffiti. It is believed that a man named Africanus owned the brothel, given that his death notice was scratched into the side of the structure:

*Africanus moritur
scribet puer Rusticus
condiscēs⁹³ cui dolet pro Africano.*

Africanus is dead.
The boy Rusticus, a schoolfellow who mourns for
Africanus, writes this.⁹⁴

Even more, some of the clients scratched their names into the building. Here is a selection of some of the graffiti:

*Victor cum Attine
hic fuit.
Victor was here with Attinis.⁹⁵*

*Sollemnes hic.
Sollemnes (was) here.⁹⁶*

*hic ego puellas multas
fui.
Here I fucked many girls.⁹⁷*

⁹² Clarke, 1998, 200.

⁹³ Franklin gives *condiscipulus* as an alternate for *condiscēs*.

⁹⁴ CIL IV. 2258a. Franklin, 1986, 323. The translation is my own.

⁹⁵ CIL IV. 2258. Franklin, 1986, 324. The translation is my own.

⁹⁶ CIL IV. 2218b. Franklin, 1986, 325. The translation is my own.

Μουσᾱ[ο]ς
ἐνθαδε
βεινει.
 Musaeus fucked inside here.⁹⁸

These pieces of graffiti tell much about the type of person who utilized this particular brothel. First, “their graffiti reflect a barely literate class, uncertain of spelling and weak in grammar.”⁹⁹ Indeed, by evaluating the names of the men in the graffiti, one discovers that their names are almost always foreign, with Victor being the exception; the fact that they did not have Roman names would suggest that these men were either freedmen or slaves. Another possibility may be that they were travelers; the Via Stabiana, which connected the Porta del Vesuvio and the Porta di Stabia, is placed just one *insula* from the brothel. The brothel’s location is ideal for attracting customers from this road, which was a major traffic thoroughfare through Pompeii. John Clarke agrees with both these assessments, suggesting that the brothel was most likely not frequented by the elite; as he states, “...the strongest argument against their use by people of refinement is their very shabbiness - hardly places, it would seem, where anyone with money would want to have sex.”¹⁰⁰ However, the proximity of the forum and the baths, coupled with the quotation from Horace presented above, would suggest to me that it is naïve to believe that high statused men did not frequent these prostitutes.

⁹⁷ CIL IV. 2175. Franklin, 1986, 324. The translation is my own.

⁹⁸ CIL IV. 2216. Franklin, 1986, 327. The translation is my own.

⁹⁹ Franklin, 1986, 328.

¹⁰⁰ Clarke, 1998, 199.

Interior Architecture and Wall Paintings

Equally as important as the location and graffiti of the brothel are the interior architectural features and wall paintings within the structure. Given that these sex shops were located in a poor, aesthetically banal area of town, it is important to look at the atmosphere within the brothel and determine the kind of environment that was created for the clientele once they were inside. As already stated, the *cellae meretriciae* were nothing more than a room with a mason bed. The *lupanar* was hardly more comfortable. There were ten cells in total that branched off of the main corridor, five on each of the two floors.¹⁰¹ Each was furnished with a stone-mason bed and a pillow. Obviously, there was little comfort for the prostitute as she performed her duties. Therefore, Clarke argues, the seven wall paintings (see figures 7-8) depicting young lovers “making love” were intended to provide the customer with a degree of fantasy, a removal from the harsh reality in which he was participating.¹⁰² For example, “[t]he fact that the seven pictures of love-making occur on beds complete with bedsteads, big round bolsterlike pillows, and colorful bedspreads already removes them from the reality of the narrow cubicles below where prostitutes and customers actually met.”¹⁰³ Antonio Varone agrees, stating that these paintings “effectively constituted a reference for the customers, more specific than their merely thematic sense, aiming to elevate a perfectly ordinary moment of basely mercenary sex in a cushioned atmosphere of aristocratic pleasure.”¹⁰⁴ It is interesting to contrast these authors’ highly symbolic interpretation of the wall-paintings with Salvatore

¹⁰¹ Clarke, 1998, 196.

¹⁰² Clarke, 1998, 199-202.

¹⁰³ Clarke, 1998, 201.

¹⁰⁴ Varone, 2000, 58.

Nappo's rather pragmatic one, that the paintings were "constituting a kind of advertisement for the erotic services on offer."¹⁰⁵

Public Buildings

I have already examined the evidence for the brothel in Pompeii based on the archaeological record. Its location within the city, as well as the graffiti, interior architecture, and wall-paintings, all create a distinct feeling of illicit sexuality. But were these characteristics limited only to those places that provided sex-for-hire? This section proposes to examine the Roman social behaviors of publicly bathing, exercising, and using latrines as examples of the Romans' attitudes toward the display of their own body and their interaction with each other in a setting that necessarily required a sense of openness toward nudity and sexuality in public.

Bathing and the Suburban Baths

By all accounts, the importance of bathing in the social climate of the Roman Empire was quite enormous. "Grand public and smaller private baths clustered all over Rome, fashionable meeting places, ideal locations for formal business discussions."¹⁰⁶ Bathing was a luxurious activity that was reserved for the late afternoon for Roman men, between performing the business of the day and preparing for their dinner. The arrangement of the bath complexes was such that one could not quickly bathe; rather, a Roman would be in the bath complex for a while, which provided the perfect opportunity to meet with clients, patrons, or friends. Although there is some dispute as to whether

¹⁰⁵ Nappo, 1998, 74.

¹⁰⁶ Dalby and Grainger, 1996, 126.

Romans would be completely nude while inside the bath complex,¹⁰⁷ the fact remains that the bathers would have had on as few clothes as possible in the company of up to hundreds of other men (and even possibly women¹⁰⁸).

Bath procedure is also contested; there is some evidence that the Romans would exercise first, much as if they were to go to the *palaestrum*. In fact, there is a passage in the *Satyricon* that speaks to this very issue. When Encolpius arrives at the bath,

Videmus senem calvum, tunica vestitum russea, inter pueros capillatos ludentem pila...nam duo spadones in diversa parte circuli stabant, quorum alter matellam tenebat argenteam, alter numerabat pilas, non quidem eas quae in terram decidebant. Cum has ergo miraremur lautitias, accurrit Menelaus et "Hic est," inquit, "apud quem cubitum ponitis, et quidem iam principem cenae videtis." Et iam non loquebatur Menelaus cum Trimalchio digitos concrepuit, ad quod signum matellam spado ludenti subiecit. Exonerata ille vesica aquam poposcit ad manus, digitosque paululum adpersos in capite pueri tersit...Longum erat singula excipere. Itaque intravimus balneum.

We saw a bald old man in a reddish shirt playing at call with some short-haired boys...Two eunuchs were standing at different points in the group. One held a silver jordan, one counted balls, not as they flew, but when they dropped to the ground. We were amazed at such a display, and then Menelaus ran up and said, "This is the man at whose table you rest your elbows: indeed what you see is the overture to his dinner." Menelaus had just finished when Trimalchio cracked his fingers. One eunuch came up at this signal and held the jordan for him as he played. He relieved his bladder and called for a basin to wash his hands and wiped them on a boy's head...I cannot linger over details. We entered the bath.¹⁰⁹

This passage is packed with information pertaining to public baths. First, it implies that exercising was performed before the bath process was begun; what makes this passage

¹⁰⁷ See Fagan, 1999, 24-28.

¹⁰⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ Petronius *Satyricon* 27-28. Michael Heseltine (trans) 44-47.

even more relevant is Petronius' representation of a bath in southern Italy, around the Bay of Naples. In addition, the traditional time of bathing is confirmed, as Menelaus confirms that this is Trimalchio's usual before-dinner activity. Third, the sheer extravagance of the episode, though typical of Petronius' representations of Trimalchio in the *Satyricon*, also supports the idea that baths could be places of luxury, where rich and powerful men congregated to engage with each other in a relaxed setting.

After the exercise, the Romans would enter the *apodyterium*, or the dressing room. This is one of the most interesting rooms in the complex, especially at the Suburban Baths in Pompeii (see figure 9). This room contains eight erotic wall paintings, which have often given the (possibly) false impression that baths were also places to obtain a prostitute. Even more interestingly, "there is only one dressing room in the Suburban Baths, and whether the two sexes bathed at the same time, or at different times, the *apodyterium* had to serve all patrons."¹¹⁰ It is possible that, since the Romans would have been disrobing in this room, it was a natural location to have representations of other instances when men and women would disrobe together. Admittedly, it is pretty suggestive to have representations of coitus on the walls where the Romans would have been undressing. Ovid suggests that the baths were an ideal place to meet a lover,¹¹¹ and Martial seems to make an interesting connection between bathing and sex:

*Cum faciem laudo, cum miror crura manusque,
dicere, Galla, soles, "nuda placebo magis",
et semper vitas communia balnea nobis.
numquid, Galla, times ne tibi non placeam?*

When I praise your face and admire your legs and hands,
Galla, you are apt to say: "You will like me better naked."

¹¹⁰ Clarke, 1998, 213.

¹¹¹ See Ovid *Ars Amatoria* 3.638-640.

And yet you always avoid taking a bath with me. Can it be,
Galla, that you are afraid you may not like me?¹¹²

In this epigram, Martial appears to be asking Galla if her refusal to bathe with him is a result of her not being sexually attracted to him (or her being afraid that his naked body will not be pleasing). This statement implies that one's presence with a member of the opposite sex at the baths could result in a sexual tryst; nevertheless, there is no direct correlation between baths and the opportunity to solicit a prostitute.

Perhaps the wall paintings were simply there as artwork appropriate to the room in which they were placed, just as a waterfall mosaic decorated the room in which the pool was located.¹¹³ It is not outside of the realm of possibility that these erotic paintings were intended simply to be artwork, used neither to encourage sexual liaisons nor advertise prostitutes' services. For the very nature of public bathing demonstrates the Roman attitude toward nakedness in public. Whereas in the modern West there is a prevailing sense of privacy in bathing, the ancient Romans were a more communal culture. There was no shame associated with nakedness. In the same way, moderns consider visual representations of coitus to be shameful displays of pornography, attaching a negative stigma upon those who engage with the images. Yet the Romans, because of their openness towards nakedness, allowed for such art to be displayed in public buildings. Such a demonstration of nakedness and coitus contributed to the Roman construct of "public sexuality."

¹¹² Martial *Epigrams* 3.51. D.R. Shackleton Bailey (trans), 1993, 236-237.

¹¹³ Fagan, 1999, 64.

Palaestra and Latrines

But this display of the naked body was not solely limited to baths. Instead, the Romans had other public behaviors such as the use of *palaestra* and latrines, which further demonstrate the presence of the naked body in the everyday activity of the city. As seen in the Petronius excerpt,¹¹⁴ some public baths had an area called the *palaestrum* which would serve as a place to exercise before bathing. However, there were often *palaestra* that were independent of a bath complex, which were sometimes referred to as their Greek counterpart, a *gymnasium*.¹¹⁵ The *palaestrum* of Pompeii was constructed in the reign of Augustus because the emperor “wished to provide the *collegia inventum* with a campus where they could train and meet, so that they were prepared in body and mind to be called up for service in the Roman army.”¹¹⁶ Often this training included wrestling, running, and swimming (all while naked), although it also served “as a meeting point for teachers and philosophers on the principles of training for mind and body.”¹¹⁷ Evidence for latrines survives almost solely in the archaeological record. However, their importance should not be understated, as almost every city contains evidence for public latrines, and their placement is most often situated in the most public areas, such as near the forum or bath complexes (though these two locations are not mutually exclusive).¹¹⁸ As John Stambaugh points out, “a row of keyhole-shaped openings indicate a decided lack of privacy, and suggest that these activities were, whether intentionally or not, social

¹¹⁴ This is quoted above 45.

¹¹⁵ The etymological root of the word, *gymnasium*, is the Greek word *gymnos* which means “naked.”

¹¹⁶ Nappo, 1998, 36.

¹¹⁷ Adkins and Adkins, 1994, 139.

¹¹⁸ Though there is a practical reason for them to be near bath complexes. As stated in Adkins and Adkins, 1994, 139, “the sewer was flushed with waste water, usually from the baths, and in front of the seats was a gutter with continuous running water for washing.”

occasions.”¹¹⁹ Perhaps it is this social function that provides the connection between these civic buildings; all three structures (the baths, *palaestra*, and the latrines) were spaces for social interaction. The fact that nakedness or representations of nakedness (or both) were present in all three spaces shows that the Romans would have encountered the unclothed body often and from a very young age. This type of desensitization to the erotic form again shows that the Romans had a form of public sexuality which may or may not have been distinct from a so-called private sexuality - i.e., that expressed in the private sphere of individual domestic structures. It is to these domestic structures that I now turn.

Domestic Structures

House of the Vettii

Many atrium houses in Pompeii contain erotic images in one or more of the rooms. I will start by examining the House of the Vettii, an extraordinary house which is rather well preserved. The Vettii brothers were an interesting pair, and the decoration of their house reflects this eccentric flamboyancy. They were freedmen who had inherited their wealth from their patron, and as extremely wealthy men, they indulged in some of the finest examples of wall decoration and domestic architecture in Pompeii. But they also seemed to be very interested in depicting erotica within their house. Think back to figure 6, the Priapus painting that hung in the *fauces* of the house. This was a symbolic place for the painting to hang because it would have been the first image that guests would have encountered. It is interesting to note that the Vettii also had a statue of the

¹¹⁹ Stambaugh, 1988, 133.

god (figure 10) in the peristyle, which would have been visible right as one walked into the atrium. Essentially, two of the first images seen when the house was entered would have been the large-phallused god, and the Vettii organized the house with this knowledge in mind.

Another interesting erotic display is the group of wall paintings in the back cubiculum. It is unclear what the purpose of this room was, but given the size and the depictions on the walls, it is often interpreted as a bedroom (at least for a servant if not for one of the brothers). The wall paintings, though, bear a striking resemblance to the ones found both in the brothel and the Suburban Baths (see figures 11 and 12). This similarity is surprising, given that the brothel and Suburban baths were both public areas, yet their erotic art looks virtually the same as the art found in a private residence.

House of Caecilius Iucundus

The erotic paintings in the House of Caecilius Iucundus further demonstrate the public display of erotica within the domestic sphere. On the north wall of the peristyle, between the *triclinium* and the *cubiculum*, there was an erotic representation of heterosexual sexual intercourse, which is now housed in the Secret Cabinet of the Naples Archaeological Museum (figure 13). The image is rather similar to the other ones that have been surveyed in this thesis (i.e., a man and a woman are engaging in the act of coitus). One oddity in this painting, however, is the presence of a servant in the left background, which adds another dimension to the representation. Clarke explains the presence of the servant as a matter of course. Often servants would be stationed in the bedroom to attend to the masters' needs, even when the masters were engaging in sexual

intercourse.¹²⁰ Pietro Guzzo would be inclined to agree with this interpretation of the servant's presence in the painting, as he draws a connection between the placement of the erotic paintings within domestic architecture and the location of the servants' quarters.¹²¹ However, I find the artist's rendition to be rather self-conscious. In a way, the viewer is transferred onto the painting in the form of the servant; both are witnessing this sexual tryst in a similar manner, that is, as a voyeur. The transfer is made even more blatant by the position of the painting within the house. Because the painting was placed on a wall in the peristyle, it is visible to any visitor to the house. Its prominent location suggests that this painting was meant to be viewed, just as the servant in the painting is meant to witness the sexual act depicted. Again, the erotica is displayed in the public space of the domestic structure purposely, not randomly.

What does this similarity say about the dichotomy of Roman public and private sexuality? If there is a difference, then we would have to assume that there was some degree of privacy, at least in the modern sense, to be had within the home. Wallace-Hadrill states, "the Roman house was no island of privacy, protected by watertight barriers against the world of public life outside. It was porous, constantly penetrated by the outside world."¹²² This is especially true for the wealthy who inhabited atrium houses; they would have clients to meet with in the *tablinum* and guests to entertain in the *triclinium*, in addition to providing lodging to those friends who were visiting from out-of-town. But this is not to say that the entire house was accessible to the public. Wallace-Hadrill differentiates between the public (the atrium) and the private (the

¹²⁰ Clarke, 1998, 163.

¹²¹ Guzzo, 2000, 44.

¹²² Wallace-Hadrill, 1994, 118.

cubiculum). It is most interesting and thought-provoking that the images used to represent sexuality in both the private sphere of the *cubiculum* and the public sphere of the brothel and bath complexes are essentially the same images. This would seem to imply that in general those sexual behaviors which were acceptable in private were also acceptable in public.

House of the Centenary

The erotic art at the House of the Centenary will serve as a final example of displays of coitus within the domestic sphere (figure 14). Of the three houses examined in this thesis, this house appears to have created the most privacy architecturally. The erotic painting was located in room 43 of the house, and it was only accessed through a small corridor (number 39) and two small rooms (numbers 41 and 42, see figure 14). The seclusion of this room alone would imply that the owner was interested in preserving privacy in regard to the erotica. John Clarke disagrees, stating that “the architectural configuration spells ‘luxury,’ not ‘lust.’”¹²³ He goes on to state that “the ancient Romans had practically no equivalent to our late twentieth century conception of privacy. The concept is simply alien to their mentality.”¹²⁴ His assessment of the constructs of public versus private for the ancient Romans is correct, but how does this explain that there was a private bath located within this house? I think it is obvious that, though the Romans did not construe privacy in the same way that modern people do, they did have a concept of something being “more or less public.” The decision to place an erotic painting in the peristyle (as in the House of Caecilius Iucundus) as opposed to in a secluded room (as in

¹²³ Clarke, 1998, 162.

¹²⁴ Clarke, 1998, 163.

the House of the Centenary) demonstrates that these homeowners were choosing whether to display the erotica in more or less public venues. The owner of the House of the Centenary was taking aspects of public sexuality and making them private by establishing his own miniature city within his house, complete with a bath complex. Again, the images which are acceptable to be displayed in public and in private are being standardized, though in this case, the owner is deciding to make the public representations of sexuality part of his private living space.

CHAPTER FOUR – CONCLUSIONS

I would like to conclude by drawing together all this information and discussing the implications for the study of sexuality in the Roman Empire. First, the literary evidence, though it is scattered throughout many different genres, provides a context in which we can evaluate the archaeological evidence of prostitution. Though archaeology should not be used to validate written sources from antiquity, the literary depictions do happen to coincide with the archaeological evidence. Such authors as Petronius and Juvenal present an even more vivid picture than the mute remains of the structures can.

Another feature of the written sources is that they introduce the researcher to the methodological problems of discussing the constructs of sexuality as they pertain to prostitution. As seen from examples in satire, oratory, and history alike, the ancient authors tended to manipulate language in order to portray infamous women in terms of the legal language for prostitution. Not only is it confusing for a modern scholar to understand the distinction, the ancients themselves grappled with this problem. Even the jurists tried desperately to make a legal distinction between an actual whore and a woman of high status and questionable morals.

The archaeological evidence is just as convoluted. As for the brothel itself, it was placed near the middle of all-important civic activities, but hidden in an alley. The prostitutes, then, were made public, but their sex-shops also retained a degree of privacy because the entrances did not open directly onto the street. The brothel was definitely a public space, yet it retained a type of *fauces* that architecturally linked it to the private atrium houses. And most interestingly of all, the images which were found in the brothel were also found in the public space of the baths and the private sphere of the individual

houses. This would seem to imply that the constraints that governed sexuality in public, in all its forms, also governed private licit sex.

In one respect, it appears that the citizens of Pompeii were taking images that were intended for private viewing within the domestic sphere and making them part of the urban texture. In the same way, Augustus implemented this practice of making private matters public when he enacted his marriage and adultery legislation. No longer were the sexual offences of the wife solely handled within the family. Instead, Augustus made it so that a husband (or father) was legally forced to divorce and prosecute his wife for adultery within sixty days of the discovery of her adultery. If he failed to do this, any male citizen could bring suit against him, citing him as a pimp.¹²⁵ A man's private business was open to public interest and scrutiny, just as the erotic paintings were added to the public areas, such as baths and taverns. This form of sexual publicness found in the law and the material culture of Rome shows the degree to which the Romans were, indeed, a communal culture.

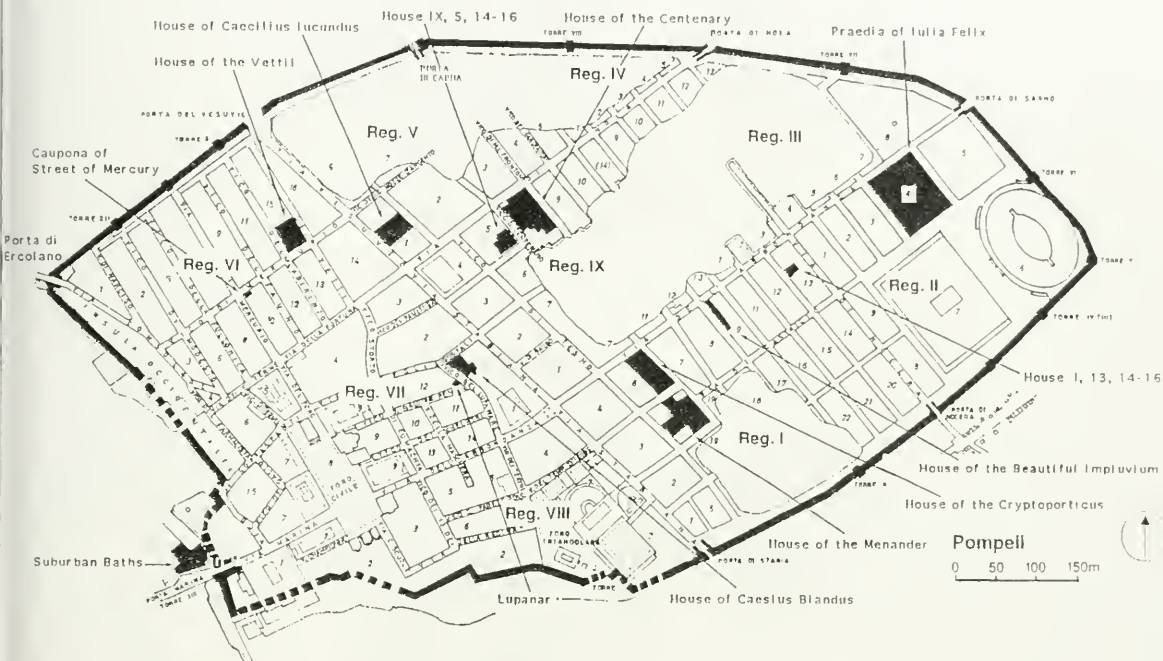
Even Suetonius' stories about the prostitute tax and the brothel on the Palatine demonstrate this shift in the early empire from private business to public interference (or benefit). Essentially, Caligula changed a private business into a marketable trade that was a benefit to the city both financially and morally, in that it provided an outlet for men to release their sexual prowess without interfering with other men's wives (cf Horace's Cato). Tacitus attests to the public regulation of prostitution by the aediles as far back as 19 CE; thus the collection of taxes from this highly profitable trade was a natural expansion of government regulation of it. Besides, if Augustus could regulate the private

¹²⁵ For a clear and concise explanation of the Augustan adultery law, see Evans-Grubbs, 1995, 203.

sexual transgressions of women of high status, surely Caligula was within his boundaries to want the city to benefit from the sexual activities of prostitutes. As for the brothel on the Palatine, if it did exist as Thomas McGinn is inclined to believe, then again, it is simply one more example of an early emperor using his license to regulate the sexuality of his people as he sees fit. This example is an extreme case, insofar as Caligula diverged from the precedent of regulating (or making public) sexuality for moral purposes. Obviously, making the wives of senators work in a brothel while all manner of men exploit their bodies is hardly in line with traditional Roman mores. But the important theme is that Caligula is continuing (or perverting, as in the brothel on the Palatine) Augustus' regulations on sexuality.

Before concluding, I would like to address one more issue. Throughout this thesis, I have focused my attentions on the evidence of prostitution in the literary, documentary, and archaeological evidence; yet my conclusions basically refer to the presence of standardized sexual mores that developed in the early Roman Empire. Why the focus on prostitution, then? My answer is twofold. First, as stated in the section on feminist theory in the beginning of the thesis, prostitutes were a real population of women about whom we have little evidence outside of the stereotypes that the literary authors perpetuate. In an effort to "populate" the past with real people, it is important to include these women, along with other underrepresented populations such as slaves. My second answer is that no history of sexuality would be complete without a thorough understanding of the intricacies and subtleties of its sexually exploited. This thesis does not touch upon male prostitutes, nor even slaves who would have served the sexual whims of their masters. In no other literature are the constructions of the subject as

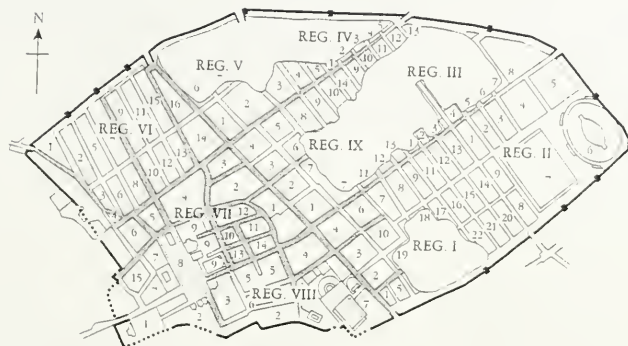
obvious as in literature that pertains to prostitutes. It is through these populations that the modern scholar can see the real sexual mores that governed the culture. Seeing how deliberately Roman authors manipulated the constructs of sexuality to fit their purposes adds great insight into the study of sexuality in general. It is through the study of prostitution that this phenomenon becomes apparent. Even more, while many classical archaeologists are not interested in further exploring the material culture of prostitution *per se*, it is imperative to our understanding of erotica. This thesis, although its conclusions speak on sexuality in general, is still a testament to the importance of studying this under- (or mis-) represented group of women.



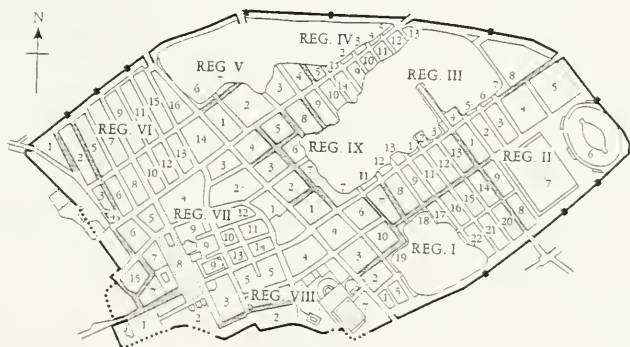
Map 1. Pompeii, plan with buildings discussed in this study indicated.

Figure 1
Town Plan of Pompeii

(a)

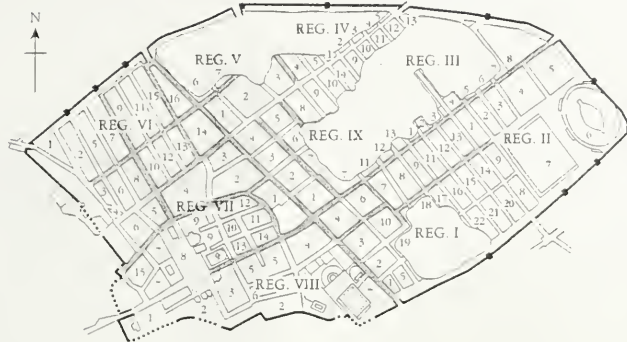


(b)



Occurrence of doorways in Pompeii: (a) 0-5 m; (b) 6-10 m.

Figure 2



(b)

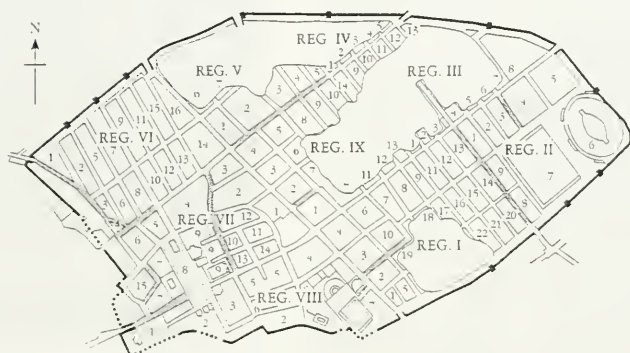


Figure 4.4 Occurrence of messages in Pompeii: (a) 0-4 m; (b) 5-8 m.

Figure 3

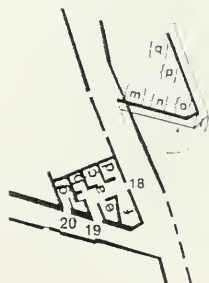


Figure 4
Plan of Brothel

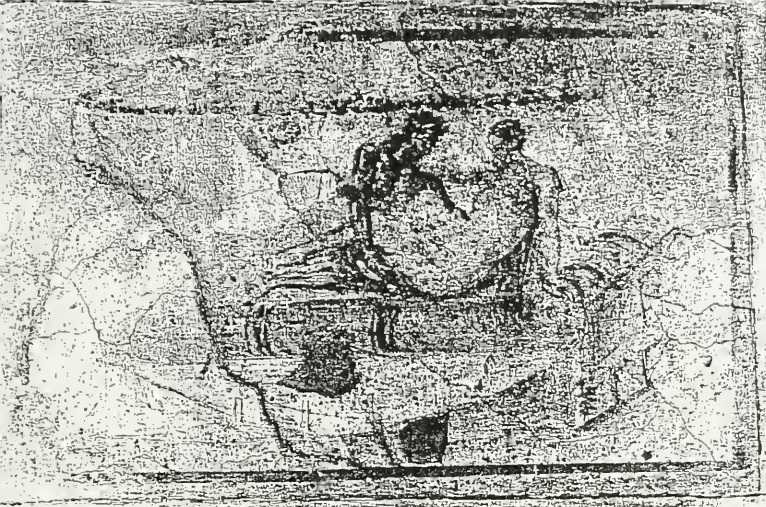


Figure 5
Priapus Painting in Brothel



Priapus weighing his member against a sack of money, Pompeii, House of the Vetri (VI.13.1) *fauces b* (A.D. 62-9) Photo Michael Larva

Figure 6



Male-female couple on bed, Pompeii, Lupanar at VII, 12, 18-20, south wall, upper zone, second panel from east (A.D. 72-79). Photo Michael Larvey.

Figure 7



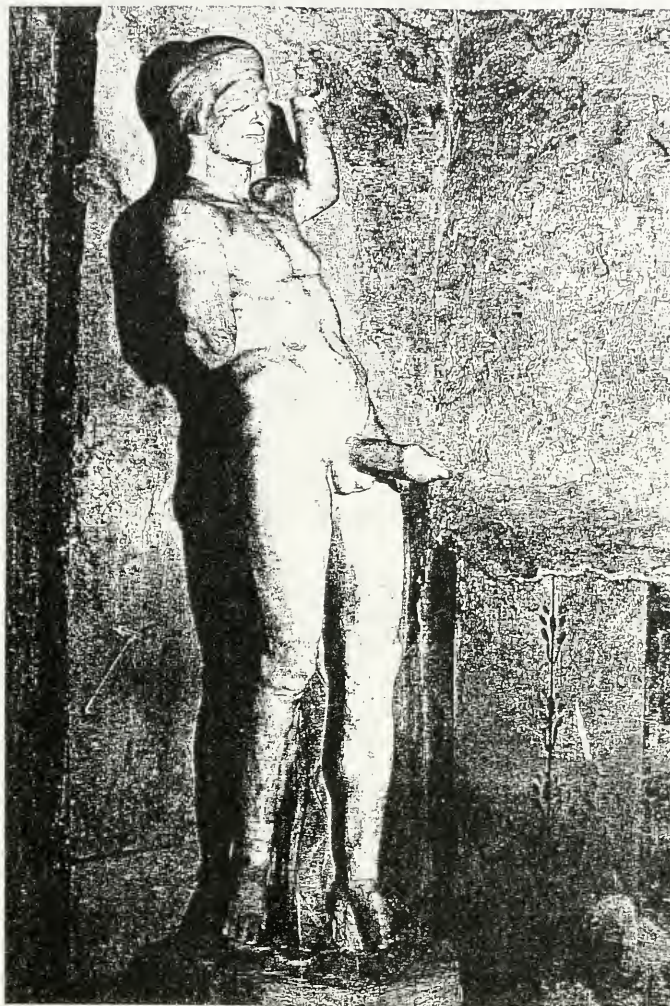
Male-female couple on bed, Pompeii, Lupanar at VII, 12, 18-20, south wall, upper zone, east part (A.D. 72-79). Photo Michael Larvey.

Figure 8



Male-female couple on bed, Pompeii, Suburban Baths, apodyterium 7, scene I
(A.D. 62-79). Photo Michael Larvey.

Figure 9



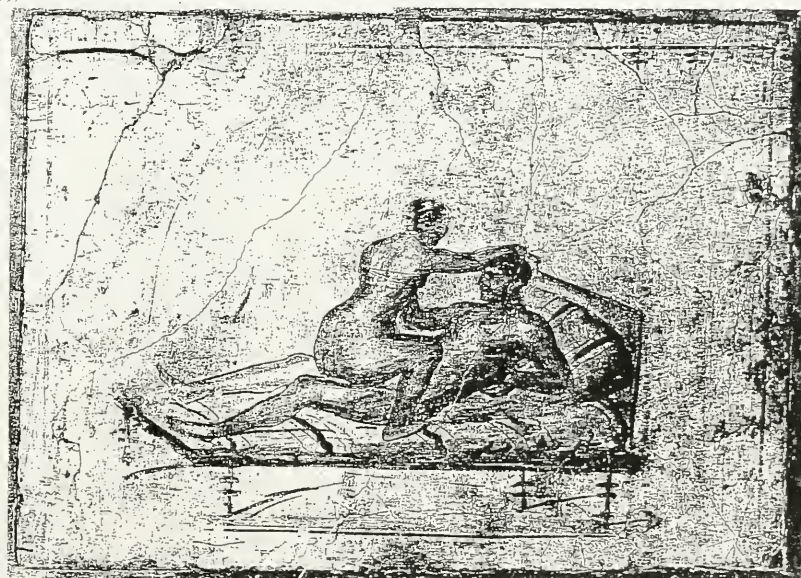
Fountain statue of Priapus, Pompeii, House of the Vettii (VI, 15, 1), from peristyle I, stored in room x' (A.D. 62-79). Photo Michael Larvey.

Figure 10



Male-female couple on bed, Pompeii, House of the Vettii (VI, 15, 1), room *x'*, east wall, central picture (A.D. 62-79). Photo Michael Larvey.

Figure 11



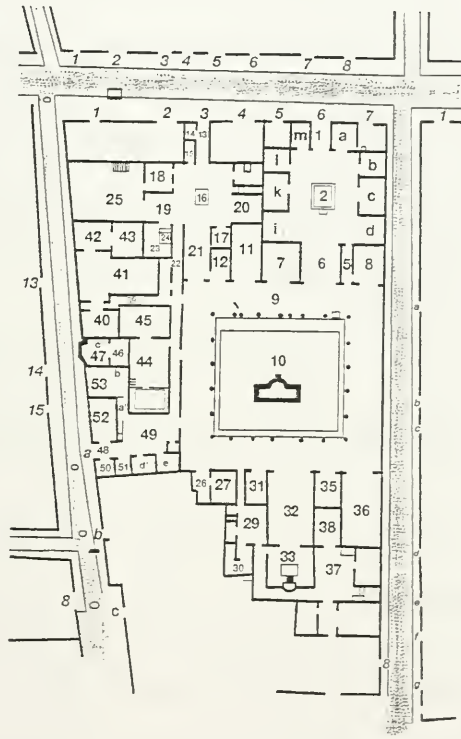
Male-female couple on bed, Pompeii, House of the Vettii (VI, 15, 1), room *x'*, west wall, central picture (A.D. 62-79). Photo Michael Larvey.

Figure 12



*Erotic scene, from Pompeii.
House of Caecilius Iocundus.
inv. 110569*

Figure 13



Pompeii,
House of the Centenary
(IX, 8. 6), plan.

Figure 14

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